



May 4, 2010

Charles Schumer, Chairman
Senate Committee on Rules and
Administration
305 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Robert Bennett, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Rules
Administration
431 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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James P. Joseph

Dear Chairman Schumer and Ranking Member Bennett:

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law ("Lawyers' Committee") wishes to share its support for the Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act (H.R. 1604) sponsored by Representative Susan Davis and Senator Ron Wyden. For four decades, the Lawyers' Committee has been at the forefront of the legal struggle to achieve equality and protect advances in voting rights for racial and ethnic minorities and other traditionally disenfranchised groups. While voter registration challenges continue to be greatest barrier to the ability to vote for most Americans, other challenges such as deceptive practices, intimidation at the polling place, unnecessary requirements to vote mail, etc. also play a large part in inhibiting voters. Thus, we believe that H.R. 1604 helps to alleviate some of these unnecessary challenges so that all Americans are better able to exercise their fundamental right to vote in the face of often difficult circumstances.

Primarily, H.R. 1604 recognizes that it is often difficult for Americans to get to and wait at polling places on Election Day. Professional and family commitments sometimes interfere with the capability of otherwise interested parties to travel. To miss an opportunity to exercise their fundamental right because of legitimate conflicts undermines our goal of increased participation in the election process. This is especially pertinent among communities of color, often victims to deceptive practices in their polling areas or disproportionately impacted by jobs from which they cannot take leave or single-parent obligations that do not allow for flexibility to travel away from home. This process also allows voters, especially those not proficient in English, to better examine the ballot and make informed choices.

While we recognize the benefits of H.R. 1604, we want to emphasize that this should only be an additional tool for voting rather than one that supersedes or supplants other methods. There should still be ample traditional polling places available in convenient locations for those who choose not to vote by mail. Poll workers should still be better trained to respond to those that have limited English proficiency or whom have general questions about registering and participating in the process. Furthermore, efforts should still be made to curtail deceptive practices that misdirect citizens as to when and where to vote.



The Lawyers' Committee, through its Voting Rights Project and its Election Protection program has long been invested in protecting the rights of citizens to engage in the voting process. Part of our goal is to increase access to the polls. We continue to strongly support efforts to eliminate unnecessary barriers to the ballot through voter registration reform, the elimination of deceptive practices and other barriers such as access to the polling place. H.R. 1604 ensures that citizens, especially those that find it burdensome to travel from home, have another viable option and we support such efforts so that all eligible Americans can, without hindrance, participate in the electoral process.

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Sincerely,

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James P. Joseph

Tanya Clay House
Director of Public Policy